

IRS POLICY ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

The concept of equal opportunity in federal employment has long been supported and reaffirmed over the years by the executive and legislative branches and in a number of Supreme Court cases.

The Internal Revenue Service is committed to providing equal opportunities for all employees and to maximizing the benefits of a diverse workforce. Within that diverse workforce, the IRS is equally committed to providing a workplace free from discrimination, including discrimination based on race. Any employee who practices racial discrimination will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

The Department of the Treasury's Equal Employment Policy issued to all employees states that the goal is "...to make the Treasury Department a model workforce, free from prohibited discrimination, where every employee is assured an equal opportunity to achieve his or her fullest potential." The Treasury Department's Employee Rules of Conduct also contain a nondiscrimination provision, which states, "Employees shall not discriminate against or harass any other employee, applicant for employment or person dealing with the Department on official business on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age or disability."

Equal Opportunity is a basic policy of the IRS. Employees, applicants for employment and members of the public who seek to participate in IRS programs, activities and services will be treated fairly. The IRS, under the appropriate laws and regulations, will ensure equal opportunity on the basis of merit and qualification, without discrimination.

The IRS in its commitment to equal employment opportunity and diversity has a National Director for EEO and Diversity reporting directly to the Deputy Commissioner. This Director is primarily responsible for developing and providing EEO and Diversity policy guidance for the Internal Revenue Service. At headquarters and each field office, there is an EEO and Diversity Office which implements the policies, with its manager reporting directly to the head of office.

Through these offices, employees who feel they have been discriminated against can raise allegations of discrimination. In Fiscal Year 1997, there were 805 formal complaints of discrimination, compared with 653 in FY-96. The most frequent causes cited for the alleged discrimination were reprisal and Race/National Origin.

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Discrimination Allegations in Milwaukee

There have recently been highly publicized accounts of discrimination complaints in Milwaukee. These complaints date back to late 1993, and continue to the present. These complaints allege a widespread climate of discrimination. In response to the complaints, the District Director commissioned a Climate Assessment Team in April 1996, challenging them to look at anything and everything to assess the EEO climate in metro-Milwaukee area and make recommendations for improvements that are needed.

The 18-member team identified 66 issues in need of attention and set up focus groups address the issues. The team also identified a survey from the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) from which they could gather more information, and an outside vendor was obtained to typeset the survey, gather the data, and provide a report of the results. The contractor's report was issued in January 1998.

The Climate Assessment Team developed a report of recommendations based on their findings. The District Director and his staff have taken responsibility for implementing the recommendations.

In November 1997, at the request of Congress, an outside team was formed to determine the issues, review the EEO complaint process in the Milwaukee area offices to determine if it discourages complaints, review and critique the Climate Assessment Survey, and issue a final report to Senators Kohl and Feingold and Congressmen Barrett and Kleczka. The team is comprised of EEO professionals from outside the IRS, including a regional director from the NAACP.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

On a national level, the National Director, EEO is sponsoring an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) working group to provide an additional avenue for resolving allegations of discrimination. The working group recommends mediation that focuses on the interests of the parties, rather than on who is "right" or who is "wrong". The IRS is working with the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) to implement a Servicewide EEO ADR program. The EEO Commission is in the process of amending its regulations to require all agencies to establish or make available an alternative dispute resolution program.

The IRS is resolute in its commitment to provide equal opportunities for all employees and to an environment free of racial discrimination, and will continue to seek opportunities to foster that environment.